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COUNCIL BUSINESS

CONDUCT OF ANNUAL MEETING.—The following circular letter has been sent to 114 delegates and others attending the annual meeting at Chicago:

Dear Sir:

The recent annual meeting was the first held under the delegate system. The officers are anxious in planning future meetings to profit as much as possible from the experience of this one and therefore invite replies from delegates and other members to the following questions:

1. Did you regard the recent meeting as on the whole satisfactory?
2. What suggestions for improvement would you make either in regard to the program or the conduct of the meeting?
3. Would you favor trying a meeting at a different season independently of meetings of larger societies, with the expectation that sufficient attendance would be secured by the sending of subsidized delegates by local branches?
4. Does it seem to you possible that larger representation of local branches and more effective sessions can be secured by an effort to have local branches provide traveling expenses?
5. At the recent meeting such votes as were taken were mostly unanimous, and controversial questions were discussed without action. Does it seem to you desirable and practicable that a different policy should be pursued under which such controversial matters would be settled (?) by a proportional ballot of delegates who happen to be present at the session in question? (At the Chicago meeting 35 institutions were represented by 65 delegates. The total number of institutions having local branches is 65, the total number having members is 168.)

E. R. A. SELIGMAN, *President.*

H. W. TYLER, *Secretary.*

Replies have been received from 58 persons, including many interesting and valuable suggestions. A study of the replies indicates that about two-thirds of the writers consider the recent meeting satisfactory. Suggestions for improvement connect themselves mainly with the importance of attendance on the part of committee chairmen, or substitutes; of publication of reports in advance of the meeting, and of the more careful preparation of topics for discussion. The reading of extended reports is deprecated. The discussion was often diffuse and rambling. Some writers urge the desirability of avoiding conflicts

with other meetings, but this is, in the judgment of the officers, a wish for the unattainable. The response to the suggestion of a meeting of subsidized delegates at a different season is too limited to justify the experiment, and the replies seem not to indicate that much can be expected in the way of financial cooperation by local branches. The replies to the question in regard to formulated expressions of opinion naturally vary widely and seem to represent divergent conceptions of the aims and purposes of the Association,—perhaps also in a measure temperamental differences among the writers themselves. In this connection it may be noted that the constitution defines the objects of the Association as follows:

Its object shall be to facilitate a more effective cooperation among teachers and investigators in universities and colleges and in professional schools of similar grade for the promotion of the interests of higher education and research, and in general to increase the usefulness and advance the standards and ideals of the profession.

One group of writers believes that it would be possible to formulate large questions of constitutional policy in such a way that a vote on them at the annual meeting of the Association should be generally accepted as representing the opinion of the profession. A majority, on the other hand, seemed to be convinced that such "decisions" would have little importance or validity and that the annual meeting of the Association is to be regarded rather as a "committee of the whole" which affords opportunity for exchange of views in a representative professional group, but that decisions should be left either to a general referendum of the whole membership of the Association or to the independent action of each local branch, such action of course having no force except for the particular institution.

The following quotations are of special interest:

"My own view continues to be:

"1. That a national association of 3,500 members can *never* have a truly *representative* annual meeting.

"2. That therefore those issues upon which the public opinion of the Association is worth recording, for the sake of its influence upon the University world, should be submitted to a vote by *mail*.

"3. That for the formulation of the Association's opinion and

vote a much larger use than now should be made of the mail during the year.

"4. That for the same purpose, every committee should be *required* to conclude its report with one or more propositions framed for submission to mail vote of the Association.

"5. That the methods used by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce at Washington, in formulating the public opinion of its 6,000 membership, be studied and employed."

"I think the principle governing the making of the program of the meeting should be this: the meeting should be devoted to such matters as could not equally well be cared for in committee or by publication in the BULLETIN. The main function of the meeting, I take it, is to serve as a place for discussion by men who would not otherwise be likely to come to know each other's views. Thus I do not believe that the presentation of a final committee report falls properly within the scope of a program. On the other hand, so long as the work of a committee is in tentative shape, discussion of the main problems of the committee would be welcome and valuable. I should suggest that the call for the meeting contain on behalf of each active committee a brief, tentative report containing a briefly annotated list of matters which the committee would like to hear discussed at the annual meeting. This same printed material should be placed in the hands of all attending the meeting. The time of the meeting could then be used effectively in discussion."

"It seems to me quite clear that the business of the Association must be done by a small working body, using some kind of machinery by which the expression of local groups could be secured. I doubt if delegates could be subsidized by local branches to attend the general meeting, unless the Association enters upon a very large and definite program. I can, of course, appreciate the difficulties inherent in such a policy. It may, moreover, seem quite ungracious for me to intimate in any way anything but appreciation of the very valuable work accomplished during these first years of the Association's existence."

A communication from the Union College Local Branch (see page 26) has been presented to the Council.